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ABSTRACT

In response to a federal mandate that Teacher Corps projects include multicultural education as a project goal, a needs assessment was conducted and the results submitted to the faculty of Auburn University at Montgomery, Alabama (AUM). It had been found that teachers in the area felt insecure in dealing with racial and ethnic issues in their classrooms and unprepared to deal with the ethnic diversity they encountered in their work. Since the majority of these teachers were former students at AUM, the university's faculty members were under pressure to review and restructure programs to meet new state teacher education guidelines that emphasized teachers' cultural awareness. A new course, Foundations of Multicultural Education, was developed and subsequently required of all education majors. This course included an introduction to the concepts of multicultural education and strategies for teaching these concepts in elementary and secondary schools. It also offered guidance in managing classrooms of culturally different students. The course's goal is to make prospective teachers more aware of the wide diversity of the United States' pluralistic society and to help these education students to handle classroom problems. (JD)

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SP 021 437

THE GENESIS OF EDUCATION THAT IS MULTICULTURAL AT AUM

Spring Quarter 1982, at Auburn University at Montgomery is noted as the first multicultural quarter. The event will not go down in the annals of history but undergraduates in the teacher education program who were on the verge of graduating took notice. Suddenly these students were being required to take two more quarter hours in a course entitled 'The Foundations of Multi-Cultural Education'. How did a school of Education unanimously agree to add required hours to programs already poor in electives? What impetus finally brought this need before the faculty? This article will deal with the history of faculty acceptance of the need for the course, the content and student reactions after having experienced the course.

June 1979, was the start of the Federally funded Teacher Corps Project at Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM). One of the federal mandates for Teacher Corps Projects was to infuse education that is multicultural within each project's goals. One major thrust of the AUM project was to develop within the graduate programs in the School of Education an emphasis on education that is multicultural. Once the Project staff was recruited and hired, extensive needs assessments were done in the Project schools, in the community and in the School of Education to help determine project goals and priorities. One issue that kept rising to the surface in the data from the Project Schools was that the teachers felt insecure in dealing with racial and ethnic issues in their classroom; and, also, they felt totally unprepared in

their undergraduate programs to deal with the ethnic diversity that they were encountering within their working environment.

This information was compiled and presented to the AUM School of Education faculty at their annual retreat at the end of October, 1979. Two important facts to consider before discussing faculty reactions to the above information were:

1. The majority of the teachers in the Project schools were former students at AUM.
2. The faculty at AUM were under pressure to review and restructure their programs to meet new State Teacher Education guidelines.

With the presentation of the data from the needs assessment, a new five hour blocked course was proposed to become a part of the required Teacher Education curriculum. Two of the five blocked hours would deal with education that is multicultural and three hours would deal with classroom relationship skills for perspective teachers. Since the faculty was intent on revising the curriculum to bring it in line with new State standards and the Dean had indicated that the faculty consider NCATE guidelines while revising, the faculty was receptive to the idea and approved the preplanning of the new course.

By January 1980, a new course, FED 351 Foundations of Multicultural Education (2 quarter hours) was required of all Education majors at the Junior level. The course description reads as follows:

An introduction to the concepts of multi-cultural education and strategies for teaching these concepts in elementary and

secondary schools. Some attention is given to managing classrooms of culturally different students.

Thus spring quarter, 1981 became the first multicultural quarter in the history of AUM.

The course content was judiciously planned to meet the needs of the typical AUM School of Education Major. Demographically this student is white, protestant, female, middle class, aged 22. The students have had very few if any in depth contacts with other racial and ethnic groups. Thus, the course was planned and implemented around the idea of exposing the students to the many racial and ethnic groups that compose our pluralistic society.

Every quarter the course has been offered, it has followed the same basic outline. The course is offered for two quarter hours and the class meets two hours a week for ten weeks. During the first class meeting, the students are requested to form groups of three and then to select one racial and/or ethnic group in our society to study in depth. This ethnic vignette culminates in an hour presentation to the class and must deal with the group's origins, nature and forms of prejudice they have experienced, survival strategies that the group devised, key values/contribution that the group has made in our society and the educational implications for the group.

During the next few weeks, while the students are researching their presentation, the Professor lectures on the phases of multi-ethnic/multicultural education, assimilationism vs pluralism, stages of ethnicity and the effect of these stages on curriculum development. Next is

the ethnic vignettes presentations. The students are encouraged to be creative in the presentation of their vignette. Finally, to close out the quarter, various guidelines are presented for handling multi-ethnic/multicultural classroom experiences. The final exam in the course consists of an exit interview with the Professor at which time the student is quized on what was the most significant course activity and why, in which stage of ethnicity the student is functioning and how the student would set up a classroom to reflect the course content. Beside the final exit interview the students are evaluated on their presentation. A group grade is given for this depending on how well the group presented the five criteria mentioned earlier. Also, the student is expected to turn in an annotated bibliography consisting of five articles dealing with a multicultural theme.

Reactions from students regarding the course have generally been positive. The first quarter the course was offered there was a twinge of hostility from students about being made to take another course but since then that feeling has abated. The main reaction of students has been one of slowly becoming aware of the extent of prejudice within our society. A typical comment would go something like this, "I knew about the prejudice against Blacks but I never realized that people would be prejudice against Mexican Americans because I think there are a couple of them living here and nobody seems to dislike them." In general the course has begun to dispell some of the provincial attitudes held by students and make them aware of a larger society and their role in that society. Even though many of the students

are still naive about themselves and their own biases, the course is slowly giving them food for thought. Another typical comment one would hear from the student would be, "I have met some Blacks and a native American, etc. and I was sure that I was not prejudice and could readily get along with anyone but now it has dawned on me that I really am prejudiced." Thus, the course has engendered to create a more realistic view of our pluralistic society within all teacher education majors at AUM.

As more students experience the course and as they evaluate their undergraduate experience in later years, they will be thankful for having had the chance to better prepare themselves for the classroom. Our goal is that by exposing the students to the wide diversity of our pluralistic society, they will handle more readily the problems of the real classroom and not be stymied initially by the fear of dealing with ethnic groups.